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Statement submitted by Right Livelihood Award Foundation, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

From victim to survivor: holistic care as a human rights standard and a condition for women's rights.

Initiated in Bukavu, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the holistic care model has become a good practice in terms of both health and humanitarian services. At Panzi Hospital, each rape survivor has a social assistant assigned to her, who designs a tailor-made healing pathway that includes physical and psychological care, legal aid, and at a later stage socio-economic support. This model is exceptional, as in most humanitarian settings services for survivors are provided separate from the health system, and often through unconnected programmes provided by different non-governmental organizations. By providing survivors with all these services in one place and in an interconnected manner, survivors can access the services necessary for their individual recovery more easily. Integrating services in a health institution is also critical to ensure their sustainability and to avoid specialised services for survivors reducing the risk of stigmatisation.

A Unique Model Contributing Directly to Women's Empowerment and Women's Rights

Rape and other forms of sexual violence are being used systematically as a weapon of war in numerous conflicts worldwide to terrorise and destabilise entire populations. Perpetrators target civilians and conduct violent acts of gang rape, sexual slavery, and other atrocities. Survivors face a cascade of consequences from permanent physical and sexual injuries, to long-term, debilitating Post-traumatic stress disorder. Moreover, survivors from every conflict ranging from Kosovo to the Democratic Republic of the Congo to Colombia have reported stigmatisation. Victims are rejected by families and communities, often encountering victim-blame and abandonment. This stigma contributes to the silence on sexual violence, which further exacerbates the structural and gender inequalities within political, economic, cultural and social structures.

Women are disproportionately targeted and are subsequently more likely to suffer the consequences of sexual violence. They are also key players in conflict-resolution and peacebuilding. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security reflects the significance of empowered women, recognising the crucial participation of women to promote peace and security through greater decision-making power in matters related to conflict prevention and resolution. Providing all survivors with access to a holistic model of care, covering medical, psychological, legal and socioeconomic needs is a concrete way to empower women towards demanding their rights and creating change both within their countries and globally.

This health model gives more than holistic individual care; it provides a platform for achieving a healthy life at the micro-(person) and meso-(local society) levels and, if conscientiously and systematically implemented in all health care structures, facilitates achievement of the right to health for all on the macro (national) level. Based on genuine listening to a harmed girl's or woman's personal narrative, personalised care is planned, implemented, and documented with the aim of achieving health and reintegration into society. Central and unique to the holistic approach of the Panzi Model is the concept of compassionate care, characterised by quality care, confidentiality, respect and self-determination. The basic standpoint of this model is empowerment of women as the foundation for constructing a plausible and prosperous society.

The holistic approach has a direct impact on preventing and ending wartime rape. At the individual level, this includes the enhancement of survivors' wellbeing, and the encouragement for other victims to seek care. Moreover, the empowerment of survivors decreases vulnerability to further violence. At the care system level, benefits include programme sustainability and cost-effectiveness. At the societal level, working in a holistic manner implies addressing the project at its roots. It promotes an environment in which sexual violence is no longer tolerated and perpetrators are held accountable.

Through holistic care, victims are transformed into survivors, empowered to become agents of change within their communities. When the wellbeing and resilience of survivors improves, they are more likely to stand up for their rights. As victims transform into agents of change, they increase their participation in decision-making processes within their households and their communities.

The Holistic Care Model: a Universal Human Rights Standard for Survivors of Sexual Violence

In Resolution 2106 (2013), the United Nations Security Council "recognise[s] the importance of providing timely assistance to survivors of sexual violence, urges United Nation entities and donors to provide non-discriminatory and comprehensive health services, including sexual and reproductive health, psychosocial, legal and livelihood support and other multi-sectoral services for survivors of sexual violence, taking into account the specific needs of persons with disabilities."

According to the United Nations Basic Principles and Guidelines on the right to a remedy and reparation for victims of gross violations of international human rights law and serious violations of international humanitarian law, victims should be provided with full and effective reparation, which includes rehabilitation: "Rehabilitation should include medical and psychological care as well as legal and social services."

In his 2016 and 2018 reports on conflict-related sexual violence, the United Nations Secretary-General reiterated the obligation and due diligence of states to provide survivors of wartime rape with a holistic set of health and care services, integrating legal, medical and psychosocial care, also for rural areas and children born from rape.

The current Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict has emphasised the need to foster "national ownership and leadership for a sustainable and holistic survivor-centred response."

The holistic care model is clearly a human rights standard that all states should aim at implementing and supporting, in their efforts to end rape and sexual violence as weapons of war.

Recommendations

Implementing sustainable victim-centred holistic care should be at the core of the efforts of the international community in achieving Sustainable Development Goal five on gender equality, Sustainable Development Goal three on health, and Sustainable Development Goal 16 on peace. This model should be made accessible to all victims of wartime rape.

Developing holistic care models should be part of a genuine commitment to end sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict contexts. We call on the international community to listen and involve survivors and women's organisations working to end sexual violence and achieve women's rights. United Nations member states should abide by their national, regional and international commitments to end sexual

violence in conflicts. This means establishing sexual violence in conflict as a crime in their legal systems and/or implement laws; ensuring that the justice system is efficient and functional, accessible and driven by the universal goal to end impunity; implementing prevention programmes, in schools and for the public, at all levels, to ensure that sexual violence won't be tolerated anymore. Moreover, United Nations member states should adopt mechanisms of transitional justice which grant survivors with the recognition of the harm they suffered and with proper reparations schemes; this includes acknowledging their own responsibility in the perpetuation of sexual violence in conflict and establishing a national reparation fund addressing all 5 forms of reparations. Finally, we call on the international community to establish an international reparation mechanism, in cooperation with non-governmental organisations and survivors, to provide symbolic and concrete reparation to all victims, and which would include access to holistic care.

The Dr. Denis Mukwege Foundation is an international human rights organisation working together with survivors of wartime sexual violence from around the world. Drawing attention to the most shameful crimes committed during conflicts, the Foundation envisions a world in which rape as a weapon of war is no longer tolerated. The Foundation works for a future where survivors worldwide receive the holistic care they need and obtain reparations; where they have the freedom to speak out and to organise globally to end wartime sexual violence. Through international advocacy and country-based programmes, the Foundation supports survivors in their struggle for recognition and their active participation in the development of international and national policies related to justice, peace and women's rights.

The Right Livelihood Award Foundation honours and supports courageous people and organisations offering visionary and exemplary solutions to the root causes of global problems. In total there are now 174 Laureates from 70 countries and working in different fields, including human rights and sustainable development. The Right Livelihood Award Foundation aims to provide long-term support to its Laureates and it seeks to enhance the protection of those award recipients whose lives and liberty are at risk. The Foundation's protection program includes, among other things, regular threat monitoring and of country situations and advocacy before the United Nations' mechanisms for the promotion and protection of human rights.